

# ***CPS REFORM WATCH***

***CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at [www.de.state.az.us](http://www.de.state.az.us) and on the Governor's website at [www.governor.state.az.us](http://www.governor.state.az.us).***

**August 2004**

***Community Effort Helps Abused and Neglected Kids With Back-to-School Needs*** – The Department of Economic Security, in partnership with 98.7 The Peak Radio and Fulton Homes, launched a campaign in August aimed at helping children in group homes and shelters with their back-to-school needs. Children are placed in group homes or shelters when they've been removed from their homes as the result of abuse or neglect; this is their home while they wait for a more permanent placement, such as a foster home or adoption. Often, children leave their homes with few personal belongings and are forced to change schools if they cannot be placed in their home communities. When it comes time to start the new school year, children in group homes or shelters lack some of the basics many of their peers take for granted – a new backpack, plenty of supplies or some new clothes.

The Children Preparing for School effort worked like many holiday toy drives; community members visited six local Westcor malls and selected a card with a child's name and back-to-school needs on it. They purchased the supplies and returned them to volunteers working at the malls. The supplies were then forwarded to the child's group home or shelter. More than 1,000 backpacks full of school supplies and other items were distributed throughout the Valley; the campaign also collected more than \$2,300 and 19 computers were donated to a local group home! This success would not have been possible without the commitment and support of our sponsors, but also the dozens of concerned community members and volunteers – from government, civic, religious and community-based organizations – who gave so generously of their time and resources to make it happen!

***Healthy Families Program Expands Abuse Prevention Efforts*** – The Healthy Families child abuse prevention program has been expanded to include 10 more sites throughout the state, including sites in Maricopa, Pima, Navajo, Pinal, Graham, Mohave and Gila counties. This expansion brings to 32 the number of sites statewide.

The expansion was made possible by a \$8.7 million increase in state funding for the program to add sites and expand existing ones. This spring the Governor signed into law SB1149, a bill which allowed the nationally recognized Healthy Families program to now serve women who are pregnant as well as families who have had previous contact with CPS.

Healthy Families Arizona is a home-based, voluntary program serving families at risk beginning at the birth of a new baby. Services include: linking families with community services, health care, child care, and housing; encouraging self-sufficiency through education and employment; modeling effective parent-child interactions; providing child development, nutrition, and safety education; teaching appropriate parent child interaction and discipline; promoting child

development and referring families for screening if the child is delayed; providing emotional support and encouragement to parents; and, offering education on successful marriage.

Over a decade of annual evaluations have consistently demonstrated that Healthy Families Arizona is a highly effective program. Outcomes for families after 12 months in the program from communities across the state in 2003 included the fact that 99% of participating families had no substantiated CPS reports and a 92% immunization rate for babies (compared to 71.3% rate for 2-year-olds in the state).

***Youth Panel Added to New Caseworker Training*** – The core training for new caseworkers has been expanded to include a 2-hour panel discussion with youth in foster care or those who grew up in care. The youth that participate are asked to cover some basic areas of their involvement with the child welfare system and then engage the future caseworkers in a discussion on how to better address their needs. Several caseworker training programs throughout the country have experimented with this concept; the Arizona program will be adjusted depending on results from those programs as well as the input of new case managers and youth who participate here.

***Pilot Program Gets Children's Medical Information to Caseworkers, Families and Providers More Quickly*** – One of the key issues identified by case managers, foster caregivers and health care providers related to providing quality and timely services to children in care is the lack of available medical history for the children. A pilot project has been implemented based out of two CPS units in Tucson to address this need. Case managers send a request for information to the Division promptly after a child enters foster care. Division staff then query available sources such as: the Arizona State Immunization Information System (ASIIS) to gather immunization history; the AHCCCS system to determine if the child was previously enrolled in a health plan; and the Department of Health Services for the results of the child's newborn screening. For children previously enrolled with AHCCCS health plans, the health plan is contacted to identify the previous primary care provider (PCP) and request information pertaining to current diagnoses, medications and the results of the most recent well-child exam. All the information is gathered and forwarded to the case manager.

Plans are underway to expand the pilot statewide, including identification of additional resources needed and modifications to the Division's data system to allow staff in the Comprehensive Medical and Dental Program to enter information directly into the system. The ultimate goal is to prevent unnecessary delays in services, facilitate quality assessments and services, and to prevent duplication of services through this process.

***Technology Updated In CPS Offices*** – Legislation passed during the 2003 Special Legislative Session provided funding for the Division to replace outdated computer equipment. So far, the Division has distributed more than 400 personal computers statewide. Additional computers and servers will be installed statewide over the next several months. Having the right tools, including dependable technology, is critical so that case managers have the information they need to keep children safe.

***Jury Trials for Severance Hearings*** – There were no jury trials held in severance case during the month of August. Since February, there have been a total of 13 jury trials in severance cases – 1 in Phoenix, 10 in Tucson, 1 in Bullhead City, and 1 in Yuma. In 12 of the 13 cases, the juries terminated parental rights. This action frees the child for adoption to a safe, permanent home. In cases where verdicts do not favor severing parental rights, the department will continue to work with the family with the goal of returning the child to the home when it is

safe to do so. The child is not eligible to be adopted or placed in a permanent home unless additional grounds for severance arise and/or until further efforts to reunify the family fail and severance is eventually granted. There are 40 cases pending statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings.

***Expansion of the Open Hearings Pilot Program*** – In legislation passed during the special session, the Open Court Pilot was expanded to include all Arizona counties. Information on the process and documents used to implement the Maricopa pilot have been shared with judges in all counties. Staff from the Division of Children, Youth and Families and the Attorney General's office are working with the courts to ensure that the pilots are implemented and evaluated according to the statute.

So far, pilot programs have been started in Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Mohave, Navajo, Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz, Yavapai and Yuma counties; La Paz county is expected to begin its pilot program in September.

***Implementation of the Governor's Action Plan, legislative changes that occurred during the 2003 Special Session, and other efforts to improve the state Child Protective Services system are coordinated through a statewide network of action teams. These teams include representatives of the Division of Children Youth and Families, as well as other Department of Economic Security staff from services such as Family Assistance, Employment Services and Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, these teams include dozens of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with state officials to keep kids safe and families strong.***